

NISRA Consultation

Domestic Violence is the intentional physical, emotional, sexual or financial abuse of one person by another, with whom they have or had an intimate relationship. It is an ongoing and systematic process of intimidation, terrorisation, undermining, degradation, and domination, and is usually committed by a man towards a woman. Domestic violence pervades without deference to class, age, religion, ethnic group or ability and affects 1 in 4 women. It is rarely an isolated event for the victim and often escalates in severity.

Women's Aid welcomes the review of Multiple Deprivation measures for N. Ireland. Women's Aid appreciates the importance of the model in ascertaining deprivation as experienced by individuals and communities and the difficulties of quantifying deprivation and disadvantage in different types of areas.

In NI, as in the rest of the UK, we need to know more about what works to help victims of domestic violence improve their lives and what services they need in their communities.

Women's Aid response focuses on the crime domain, but it is important to note that domestic violence affects all the other deprivation domains – in particular, those of health, employment, income deprivation and geographical access to services. The destruction of attachments to others and the separation of the woman from sources of material, emotional or mental resources, such as employment, social life, health support and finances are a key feature of men's violence and abusive tactics.

Women's Aid welcomes the proposed crime domain for the new NI Measures of Deprivation. Deprivation resulting from crime is different to deprivation resulting from social environment, as in the previous Measures of Multiple Deprivation in 2001.

It is proposed within the document that measuring crime in the four areas of burglary, violence, theft and criminal damage will represent the risk of personal and material victimisation at a small area level and that domestic violence be included **within** these four areas, and not as an indicator in its own right.

Women's Aid recommends instead that a new crime domain, and/ or indicators, is created that cover domestic violence. The NIO Crime Survey (2001) found that domestic violence accounts for around one-third of all recorded violent crime in Northern Ireland. The PSNI in 2003 – 2004 attended 16, 926 domestic incidents, of which 8, 565 were crimes. Even with these statistics, there is evidence of under reporting of domestic violence - the NIO survey found that the police were unaware of the vast majority (84%) of worst incidents, with only 1 in 7 incidents reported to the police. There many reasons for this - according to a Home Office report by Sylvia Walby and Jonathan Allen, women survivors state that reasons for not involving the police in cases of domestic violence were:

- the incident was too trivial (41 percent);
- it was a private family matter (38 percent);
- they did not want any more humiliation (7 percent);
- they feared more violence or that the situation would get worse if the police were to be involved (13 percent).

This last figure means that one-in-eight women suffering domestic violence thought that the police would make matters worse rather than better. In addition, many women in N. Ireland find it difficult to report to the police due to the continued presence of paramilitarism and in many communities this has, and still does, prevent women from coming forward to the police to have the crime recorded.

The four indicators show crime and the threat of crime as external, when, in fact, the home is the most dangerous place for many women. Domestic violence is the major cause of death and disability for women aged 16 – 44 (Council of Europe statistics). Focusing on street violence and external threats ignores the uncomfortable reality of domestic violence and any important differences will not be addressed if all these forms of violence are combined together. In the past, domestic violence was recorded under general violence statistics. Assimilating domestic violence once again into general crime statistics is going backwards and will only serve to hide the true nature of this social problem and lead to inefficiency in the long term in time and resources.

In relation to gathering information through crime surveys, the BCS limitations are:

- the survey's emphasis on crime restricts victims from reporting events that they do not think are crimes;
- victims may not be able to reveal traumatic events;
- there is omission of information on sexual coercion i.e. rape and sexual assault; and
- the limitation of the sampling frame to those permanently resident in domestic households excludes those in temporary or refuge accommodation.

Illustrating this, the NIO Crime Survey found that little over one-third (37%) of identified victims classified their incident as a crime. A further 29% believed that although it was wrong, it did not constitute a crime while over one-quarter (27%) of victims accepted their assault as 'just something that happens'. Women were only more likely to describe what had happened to them as 'domestic violence' or as a 'crime' if they sustained injuries and if the acts were severe and repeated.

Research on the under recording of this crime suggests that self –completed questionnaires seem to be more effective than face to face interviewing. In a self-

completed questionnaire carried out as part of the 2001 BCS, 2.8 percent of a sample of more than 22,000 women and men revealed they had been victims of domestic violence during the year, compared with 0.6 percent reported in the main BCS, which is based on face-to-face interviewing.

In relation to other alternatives for gathering victims' opinions - Crime Reduction What Works says:

“State-of-the-art surveys locate domestic violence in a context so as to ascertain its meaning and impact, include sexual coercion, and broaden their range of violence to include that against women outside the home. These surveys have reported significantly higher rates of violence than surveys that have asked the questions within the framework of a generic crime survey. As a consequence, the British Crime Survey is likely to underestimate the true extent of domestic violence. The UK needs a survey dedicated to measuring domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, which uses the kind of state-of-the-art methods used in surveys carried out in Canada, the US, Australia and Finland.”

It is important to remember that forms of male violence which are usually perceived to be prevalent in the public sphere are also perpetrated by violent men against women within intimate relationships.

Improvements in gathering accurate statistics on domestic violence across all agencies could lead to an alternative data source to police recording statistics. Consideration should also be given to the statistics that the voluntary sector holds, ie. Helpline statistics or the number of women in refuges.

Conclusion

Women's Aid recommends that a new crime domain and/ or indicator is created that is specific to domestic violence.

Effective research, coordinated recording systems and analysis based on appropriate measures will ensure an accurate picture of the prevalence of domestic violence in NI and should lead to the coordination of services saving time and resources as well as meeting the needs of those who experience deprivation through domestic violence throughout NI.